



Testimony of ConnCAN
Education Committee Hearing
March 4, 2022

Testimony Regarding: SB 226, SB 228, SB 229, SB 231, HB 5279, HB 5280, HB 5282, HB 5283, HB 5285, HB 5286, HB 5287, HR 4, SR 4

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members Representative McCarty and Senator Berthel, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Subira Gordon and I am Executive Director of ConnCAN.

Today, I am here to testify on: [Senate Bill 226](#), [Senate Bill 228](#), [Senate Bill 229](#), [Senate Bill 231](#), [House Bill 5279](#), [House Bill 5280](#), [House Bill 5282](#), [House Bill 5283](#), [House Bill 5285](#), [House Bill 5286](#), [House Bill 5287](#), [House Resolution 4](#) and [Senate Resolution 4](#).

In Support of Senate Bill 226

The State Department of Education (SDE) plays an essential role in setting direction, maintaining high expectations, and providing technical assistance to our schools. This year SB 226 provides some simple, highly popular provisions to build sustainability and flexibility in a post-pandemic world.

Specifically, ConnCAN supports the provision that extends the professional teacher certification period from five to ten years. This reduces the cost for educators, and increases flexibility for those who may wish to rejoin the profession after a hiatus or career change. Individuals with a professional teacher certificate have demonstrable experience in the classroom and already receive significant professional development opportunities in their role. The certification hurdle is largely an administrative box checking, rather than a push towards greater quality.

ConnCAN also supports the added reissuance flexibility for initial and provisional certificate holders. This will instantly increase the pool of qualified and eligible candidates to enter and remain in the profession.

ConnCAN supports any effort to increase access to healthy, low/no cost food options for children in Connecticut.

In Support of Senate Bill 228

One of the key roles of a public education is to adequately prepare students for the rest of their lives. Often, this leads to a conversation about college or beginning a career. However, Connecticut has historically focused solely on college going rates as a sign of success, rather than gainful employment, stable wages, resident well being, and long-term health outcomes. SB 228

is a smart start to build networks of existing schools and businesses to develop the workers of tomorrow.

By providing apprenticeship training to all students, regardless of whether they plan to attend a post-secondary institution or get right into the workforce, we are investing in their futures. ConnCAN believes that happy, fulfilled people who feel successful and impactful in their communities is the foundation of a vibrant, welcoming society.

In Support of Senate Bill 229

The two-step charter authorization process is broken. When a charter applicant goes through the rigorous process of approval through the State Board of Education, it receives substantial scrutiny. All necessary questions are asked, teams research the education model, financial sustainability, community voice, and value proposition of the additional school. This is a worthy endeavor. However, once the charter application is approved, they must wait for the governor to include their funding in the budget, and for the legislature to appropriate the necessary funding to open their already approved doors. This system has shown its limitations through the drawn-out, deeply unfair treatment of the approved Danbury charter school. While receiving approval in 2018, they've waited four years for appropriations.

To fix this issue moving forward, SB 229 creates a mechanism to hold funds specifically for approved charter schools to begin the necessary processes of opening which include: building preparations, hiring of educators, purchasing of textbooks and technology, among others.

Each year, the legislature is inundated with calls from community members across the state pleading for funds to open an already approved and vetted school. SB 229 is a great first step in fixing that issue.

More can be done, however. SB 229 should include two additional provisions. First, the bill should compel the governor's office to include any approved charter school funding into their budget and budget adjustment proposals. For too long, the issue has been negotiable, students and families have suffered, and the much needed funding has been left out. Second, when the State Board of Education approves a charter applicant, the school should receive its official charter. This way, there is no confusion surrounding the legitimacy of their approval. By changing the system, we can finally stop having an yearly discussion about the same rehashed issues. We can finally move forward.

In Support of Senate Bill 231

Over the past two years, the State Education Resource Center (SERC) has demonstrated how important they are to the children and education systems in Connecticut. First, they developed, in record time, a well-written and structured Black and Latino Studies curriculum. It was an inclusive, focused process that brought some of the best minds in the field together. This past year, they have been asked to develop anti-bias video modules for educators hiring professionals across the state. This work will reduce unintended bias in hiring, and will support best practices in developing a diverse educator workforce.

SERC also continues to be a key facilitator for educators and educational leadership in the state. They are the fiber that holds together a lot of essential brain work in education.

SB 231 helps clarify and expand SERC's role in supporting local educational agencies and produces more consistent funding from the state for their services. This will increase SERC's sustainability and impact.

In Support of House Bill 5279

Given the positive role early childhood programs have on educational outcomes later in life, ConnCAN supports efforts to modernize, grow and enhance the statute language from the Office of Early Childhood.

Over the past two years, the turnover rates and staffing shortages present in the early childhood sector have put undue burdens on centers, educators, families, employers and communities. The impacts for women, people of color and low-income families is even more pronounced. By increasing flexibility in staff, while maintaining high standards of care, Connecticut early childcare centers can begin to right the ship. A stable early childhood system improves stability and experience in the K-12 sector.

In Support of House Bill 5280

In the Education Cost Sharing formula, there exists a weight for English Language Learners (ELL), largely due to the demonstrated support required to teach English to children who may not possess proficiency. But, we can do more.

Bilingual education, along with dual language programs have been popular for ELL students, and families seeking exposure to non-English languages. By increasing the funding for and the understanding of bilingual and dual language programs, Connecticut can learn valuable, and scalable lessons.

In Support of Sections 1 & 2 of House Bill 5282

ConnCAN fully supports sections 1 & 2 of this bill. It is essential to expand the curriculum to include the voices, experiences and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. In the last three years, there's been an alarming increase to Asian hate crimes, largely due to cultural ignorance, misinformation and bias. This legislation begins the process of learning about non-white cultures in our schools, and understanding the various nuances of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

When we passed the Black and Latino studies bill, expanded the curriculum to include Native American history, and included the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community, the next logical step was to include other voices, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. For students to be successful, they must understand the diversity and well-roundedness of American culture. This bill helps to solve that problem.

In Support of House Bill 5283

As a response to the pandemic, the federal government passed three aid packages to support schools. These funds have provided substantial support to districts through September 2024. And, many of our highest need districts received the most, in large part because of the federal government's use of Title I calculations. In the short term, this alleviates the historic underinvestment in many of our high-need school districts. It allows districts to hire teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers, counselors, tutors and interventionists. Schools can renovate, build better HVAC systems, purchase technology and high-quality instructional materials. These funds are much needed because of how much Connecticut underfunded its highest-need schools prior to the pandemic. And, that system will return with a vengeance once the federal funds run out. That is, unless the legislature adopts a long-term, sustainable and equitable solution to school funding. That solution is HB 5283.

Last week, hundreds of Connecticut residents testified on SB2, a mental health bill that has significant implications for students in our schools. Today, you'll also hear from residents about the Sheff vs. O'Neill settlement, a case that should have reverberating effects on our state, but is limited to the Hartford area in scope. Both bills become more significant, more universal, and more equitable when partnered with student-centered funding, as outlined in HB 5283. By having each conversation separately, we lose out on a once-in-a-generation opportunity to solve some of Connecticut's most persistent educational problems: mental health, educational access, resources and school choice.

The equity component of HB 5283 is the key reason why ConnCAN works alongside coalition partners in this work. We have the chance to significantly reduce the racial and economic disparity funding gaps in education with this bill. The bill alone reduces the gap by 40%, or \$190M. And, the only reason it doesn't do so more is because it does not alter the inherently unfair use of local property taxes as a primary means for collecting educational revenues. HB 5283 gets us as close to equity as the current structures allow. We should be proud of the opportunity to fix this issue, and we have a great responsibility to our families, educators and schools to do so.

At a time when the State of Connecticut has a maxed out rainy day fund, and optimistic revenue projections for the coming years, we must invest in ourselves. While our state revenues may be sunny, our educational system is experiencing a downpour. The federal funds help in the short-term, but we must accelerate our state-level support starting FY25. That way, the investments made during this time of recovery can continue, and serve our students; many of whom can;t wait any longer.

In Support of House Bill 5285

Climate change is settled science and its impact already has reverberating effects on our world. In the United States, the impacts of climate change are inequitably felt. Communities of color are often the least prepared for climate catastrophes, and some of the worst pollution producing sites are located in areas with high concentrations of black and brown families. The health consequences are significant through asthma diagnoses, access to clean water, and storm

resiliency. Our families deserve environmental justice, and our students deserve to understand and learn about the impacts of climate change on our society.

HB 5285 expands the curriculum to include climate change. This is smart step in righting the historical wrongs of environmental racism, and for supporting our students to participate in the green future, which includes jobs, opportunities and resilience.

In Support of House Bill 5286

ConnCAN believes that a diverse educator workforce is key in developing the leaders of tomorrow. Any pre service and preparation performance system should be built to invite and support a diverse population of education students. And, any system should provide flexibility and opportunities for advancement in the education field.

ConnCAN stands ready to support the state to make smart adjustments to the pre-service and preparation performance system for high-quality educator candidates.

In Support of House Bill 5287

The pandemic highlighted how flexible we must be in building a high-quality education system for our students. Additionally, we learned that many students benefited directly from a remote learning model, and it allowed for several innovations that we likely would not have been prepared to make. That being said, Connecticut must build high-quality remote learning opportunities for students K-12. That way, if a stoppage of learning occurs, or we must meet the specific needs of certain students, we have a vetted, well-designed system in place.

ConnCAN has always supported innovation, flexibility and high-standards of excellence. Connecticut is making smart choices to build out its remote learning systems and this legislation continues that work.

On House Resolution 4 & Senate Resolution 4

The Sheff vs. O'Neill court case has transformed the Hartford region in terms of school choice. It accelerated the growth magnet schools, and offered a potential solution to deeply segregated schools. Three decades later, Connecticut finds itself investing more funds into the Sheff settlement, with the conversation shifting to socio-economics rather than solely about race, and with continued segregation throughout the state.

Sheff, in itself, does not solve the deep inequities present in our educational system. Cities like Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, Windham, and New London are not impacted by Sheff, even as they struggle with the same issues as the Hartford region. Additionally, Sheff attempts to solve a discriminatory housing and economic problem with an educational solution. We have seen firsthand the educational outcomes students in our cities can achieve with the right support, and resources. We know that a combination of highly talented educators, stable leadership, high expectations and education resources is the right recipe for success. Sheff started an important conversation, but that conversation has changed significantly in the last 33 years.

We must complement the Sheff settlement with a student-centered funding system, as outlined in HB5283. That way, students across the state benefit from expanded access to resources and experiences. Also, student-centered funding focuses on the needs of each child, rather than focusing on the location of that child's seat. Children can be successful anywhere they sit. Sheff started the work of analyzing educational inequity in Connecticut, and now Student-centered funding can fulfill the goal of that work: an equitable education system that creates opportunity for all children, regardless of where they live.